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Watch on CIA

The always thorny question of who, outside the executive branch and the intelligence community, is to monitor the Central Intelligence Agency—an issue that has been given increasing general attention since the Bay of Pigs—may be cooling now because of an informal arrangement made by the Senate's present chief monitor.

Sen. Richard Russell, chairman of the Senate group that has, through periodic briefings by the CIA, kept a watchdog's eye on its general activities, invited to the last briefing Jan. 9 four senators not on that panel—most notably Sen. Fulbright, who has led the battle to have members of his Foreign Relations Committee officially enrolled among the monitors. Also invited were Sen. Hickenlooper, chairman and ranking Republican of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Sens. Mansfield and Dirksen, the Democratic and Republican leaders in the Senate.

In view of some of the bitter exchanges about motives that have marked the debate on enlarging the watchdog committee, this would seem a welcome peacemaking maneuver that could serve well enough in reasonably quiet periods. But it is informal, and, as Sen. McCarthy has commented, "There remains, however, a question of whether this can be given and taken away." It would be better to make the broader committee a formal one to avoid future arguments, or to set up a new House-Senate one, as has been often proposed, along the lines of the joint committee on atomic energy.